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*Natural history in stories for
little children, by M.S.C.*

Mary S. Claude



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NATURAL HISTORY IN STORIES.



THE MARTINS.

NATURAL HISTORY IN STORIES

FOR LITTLE CHILDREN.

By M. S. C.,

AUTHOR OF "TWILIGHT THOUGHTS," "LITTLE POEMS FOR LITTLE
PEOPLE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRISON WEIR.

"Small service is true service while it lasts."
WORDSWORTH.



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TO MY LITTLE INDIAN NIECES,
THESE STORIES, ABOUT THE LIVING THINGS AT HOME,
ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

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NATURAL HISTORY

IN STORIES.

THE MARTINS.

I DARE say you all know that the swallows leave us in the winter, and come back in the spring. The swallows that build their nests under the eaves, are called house martins; and it is about a pair of these I am going to tell you.

It was the end of April when they arrived, and if they could have spoken, they must have had a great deal to tell about the warm countries, where they spent the winter; but as it was, they twittered merrily together and played about, and rested themselves after their long journey.

B

They were pretty little birds, with wings and backs of a very dark blue, that was almost black, they were white underneath; and their legs were covered with soft downy feathers quite down to the toes.

Near the end of May, when the weather was fine and warm, they began to think of making a nest. So they chose a place under the eaves of a house, and went to look for clay. The clay was to build the nest with, but as it would have been too soft by itself, they mixed it with little bits of broken straws, and that made it tough and strong. Then they carried the clay, a little at a time, in their beaks, and plastered it against the wall, where the nest was to be.

Every morning early they worked at the nest, until they had made the sides half an inch higher, and then they knew it was time to stop; for if they built too much at a time, the soft clay did not hold, and they had to do their work over again.

But whilst they flew about and fed and amused themselves, the clay sides of the nest had time to grow hard and dry. In ten days they had built a

strong, warm nest, with a little hole to go in at, near the top; but still it was not finished, for though they did not mind it being rough outside, they wanted it to be smooth and soft inside, for the young ones to lie in. So they lined it with small straws and grasses, and feathers; and when all was ready, the mother laid five white eggs in it.

When the young ones were hatched, they were naked helpless little things, and the two martins fed them by turns, and were very careful to keep the little close nest quite clean for them. From early morning, until late in the evening, they flew backwards and forwards to their young ones, feeding them with small gnats and flies. Sometimes they sat with them in the nest and sang to them in a gentle way, that was very pleasant to listen to.

When the young ones were older, and their feathers grown, they grew impatient to leave the nest, and they used to sit all the day with their heads out of the hole, looking about them.

When the mother came with food, she clung to the outside of the nest and fed them there.

At last it was time for the nestlings to fly. What little young creatures they were to fly down from such a height! but they managed it very well, and the parents were there, to look after them, and even to feed them as they flew about in the summer air.

One day, a hawk came near, while the young martins were flying, and would have been glad to catch one of them; but an old swallow, that lived in the chimney, cried out to let them know that there was danger near. Then all the martins and swallows that had nests there, joined to chase the hawk away with loud screams. They buffeted him with their wings too, so that he was glad to get off.

By the end of August, the young martins were old enough to take care of themselves, so they left their parents and went to live with a large flock of other young ones.

With them they practised flying all the rest of the summer; so when the cold weather came, they were able to go with the rest over sea and land, to the warm countries.

THE WHITE BUTTERFLY.

THERE was once a little caterpillar hatched from a tiny yellow egg upon a cabbage leaf. The little creature began to eat the leaf, it seemed to eat all the day long. It crept about on the cabbage leaf with its sixteen little feet, and eat the parts that it liked best.

After a few days, something curious happened to it; its skin came off, and there was a nice new one under it. The colour of its skin was grey, with black spots, and it had a yellow line down its back, and one down each side; and there were short hairs over its body. The caterpillar got a new skin five times, and each time it looked longer and plumper than it did before.

At last the time was come when the caterpillar did not want to eat any more cabbage; and it crawled

away to find a quiet place to rest in, for it felt that it was going to be changed into a chrysalis.

It crawled about till it came to a tree, and then it crawled up the trunk, as far as one of the branches; and what do you think it did there?

It chose out a part of the branch, and then began to spin. It spun very fine threads of silk with its mouth.

You might have seen it if you had been there.

It bent over, with the silk thread in its mouth, and fastened it to the bark of the branch, and then it bent its head over to the other side, and fastened another thread there; and so again and again, till it had spun enough threads to keep it safe from falling, and then it stretched out its head and body quite straight, and became a chrysalis.

It soon looked quite hard, and as if it was dead, and it did not want to move or eat. And so it lay for a great many days.

But one very warm summer day, the chrysalis began to stir, and presently a large white butterfly crept out of the dry, dead looking chrysalis. The butterfly stayed upon the branch of the tree, to unfold and dry its four new wings.

I dare say you have often seen one like it in the garden. Two of its wings were quite white, and two had black edges and black spots, and the wings had pretty white veins in them.

As soon as the butterfly's wings were quite spread out and dry, it left the tree and flew down among the flowers in the garden, and sucked the honey from the sweet roses.

After a time it found another butterfly, just like itself; and it was glad, and flew to it, and then they played together among the flower beds. The flowers were so sweet, and the air was so warm and soft; and the two butterflies were as happy as butterflies could be.

But just then, a boy came running into the garden with his cap in his hand; he shouted and jumped, for he was glad to get out after his lessons. When he saw the butterflies, he began to chase them, and try to catch them in his cap. He did not really want them, for they could be of no use to him, but he did not stop to think of that.

The butterflies tried to get away, and at last they flew over a hedge into a field. Then they

were safe, for the boy was not allowed to go out of the garden by himself. When he went into the house again, with very red cheeks, and quite out of breath, his mama asked him what had made him run so fast; he told her that he had been trying to catch butterflies, but that they got away over the hedge.

Then his mama said—

“I am glad that the pretty butterflies got away; if you had caught them in your cap, they would have been broken and bruised, and all their beauty and their pleasure would have been spoiled. Butterflies only live for a short time, and I think that the God who made them likes to see them happy.”



THE WASPS.

ONE fine summer day, little Ellen was sitting at work by her mama's side. She was sewing very busily, without speaking a word; but all at once, she cried out in pain, and put her hand to her neck. Her mama got up quickly, to see what it was, and said "Do not be afraid, Ellen, I see what it is—a wasp has stung you; but I am taking it away, so it will not hurt you again."

Ellen cried more when she heard that it was a wasp, and the sting really hurt her a good deal. Her mama put the wasp out of the window, and then fetched a bottle from the cupboard, and said, "Come, Ellen, I will put some ammonia on the sting, and that will prevent it from swelling, and soon take off the pain."

The ammonia was put on, and Ellen left off

crying, and said to her mama, "Why did the wasp sting me? John always says they do not sting, unless we hurt them. I am sure I never even saw this wasp."

"Your brother John is right, my dear," said Ellen's mama; "the wasp was hurt, though you did not know it: it crept under the hem of your frock—and when you moved, it was squeezed and frightened, and so it stung you."

"I never thought of that," said Ellen; "first the wasp was frightened and hurt, and then I was frightened and hurt."

"Yes," said mama; "but the wasp did not make quite so much noise as you did."

Ellen said nothing to that, but tried to remember what her mama called the stuff she had poured upon her neck, but the name was too difficult for her.

"It is called ammonia," said mama; "and honey is a good thing to put on a sting, or a crushed onion, or even some mould out of the garden."

"I like to know all the cures," said Ellen; "but I don't think I should like to have to take a wasp off anybody's neck, as you did, mama; but I am only a little girl, you know."

"Yes," said mama; "but even little girls are brave, sometimes. One day when I was at the sea side, I was watching a little girl, who was bathing; she was not older than you, Ellen, I think. I saw her stoop to look at an insect that was struggling in the water, and then she took it up in her hand, and carried it on shore, and laid it carefully upon a stone to dry; and then I saw that it was a wasp. I asked her if she was not afraid of being stung, and she said, 'I thought it would be drowned, and that would have been a pity; and I did not think it would sting me, when I was helping it out of the water.'"

"She was a kind little girl," said Ellen, and then cried out to John, who came to ask her if she would play with him—"I have been stung, and mama has put the wasp out of the window. I wonder where it is now?"

"I can tell you where your wasp went," said John.

"Can you, really?" asked Ellen.

"Yes, I know where the nest is," said John.

Ellen thought that only birds had nests, so she wanted to hear all about it.

"It is built in the ivy, against the house," said John, "between the old grey ivy stems; it is not finished yet, and the wasps are as busy as can be. Would you like to come and watch them?"

Ellen said "Yes" and "No," and then "Yes," again, for she thought of the pain of the sting; but at last she went with John, for he said he would not take her very close to it.

The wasps' nest was so near to the ground that Ellen could see it quite well. The wasps were buzzing about, and some were creeping in and out of a little hole.

"That is the way into the nest," said John. "There are pretty little cells inside, where the wasps keep their young ones; they feed them, just as birds feed their nestlings. They are very fond of them, and never tired of working for them."

"But what are the wasps doing outside?" asked Ellen.

"Come a little nearer," said John, "and then you will see. They are making the walls of their nest stronger; each wasp holds a little ball of something between its head and its feet, and

plasters and smooths it on as neatly as possible. See, they make the outside of the nest look like shells joined one to another. Is it not pretty?"

"What do they build with?" asked Ellen; "it looks brown, like earth."

"You would not easily guess what it is," answered John. "Those little balls are made of wood; yes, indeed, the wasps have gnawed it from the old post in the garden—I can show you the very place. They gnaw the wood with their sharp jaws, and then wet the little shavings, and roll them into balls, and carry them to the nest, and spread them out as thin as paper. The cells inside are made of the same; there is no honey stored up in them, they are only cradles for the young ones. The old wasps feed them there, day by day; they bring bits of fruit, or little caterpillars, or sugar, or anything sweet they can find. Sometimes a wasp will rob a bee of its load of honey, and take that away to the young ones."

"Oh, poor bee!" said Ellen, "to lose its honey, when it has worked hard to gather it from the flowers."

Ellen then asked when the nest would be

finished; and John said in September or October, and that then the cold nights would kill almost all the wasps, and only a few would be left alive till the spring.

“And what will they do?” asked Ellen.

“They will lie asleep until the warm days of spring, and then rouse themselves, and leave the old nest. We may see them in the sunny days of March, flying about the garden, seeking for a safe place to begin a new nest in.”

“They must feel very lonely,” said Ellen.

“I suppose they have too much to do, to think about that,” answered John; “and besides, the young ones soon begin to help their mother with her work.”





THE TAME WOODPIGEON.

THE TAME WOODPIGEON.

THERE was once a little girl called Alice, who was lame in her feet. She could walk about the house, but she could not run, and climb, and jump about like other children.

When her brothers and sisters went out in the spring to look for primroses, or in the summer to gather strawberries, or in the autumn to get nuts, Alice was always left at home; and she felt very dull, and sometimes cried when she was quite alone.

Her brothers and sisters were sorry, too, that she could not go with them; and they always gave her some of their flowers and fruit, and told her about their walks, and what they had seen. But still Alice often felt very lonely and sad whilst they were away; and one day, she said "I

wish there was a cat or a bird, or something alive, to keep me company whilst the others are away."

Her eldest brother heard this, and thought about it; and one day, when he was climbing a tree in a wood, he found a woodpigeon's nest, with two young ones in it. They were nearly old enough to fly, and looked so pretty and plump, he thought how much Alice would like one for a pet; so he took the prettiest out of the nest, and brought it down safely in his hat.

When he got home, he asked Alice to guess what he had brought for her—and then he showed her the little pigeon. Alice was quite delighted with the little bird: she took great care of it, and fed it, and petted it; and it grew tame enough to eat out of her hand, and to perch on her shoulder, and come when it was called. It was not kept in a cage, but allowed to go about the house, and the little bit of garden behind the house; and it never seemed to wish to get away. In the middle of the day it used to go into a dark corner, as if it did not like the strong light; but at daybreak it was awake and lively. It went to roost over Alice's window every night—and there it slept,

perched on one leg, with its head beneath its wing, till the first dawn of light.

In this way the woodpigeon lived through the summer and the winter; and when the other children were out, Alice amused herself with it; and when she looked at it, she thought—"My brother remembered me, though I was not with him;" and that was a pleasant thought, and made her smile.

When the spring came, the pet woodpigeon was full-grown; the feathers on the neck shone with pretty mixed colours, and the eyes were bright and red, and Alice was fonder of it than ever.

On one of the first warm days, Alice's brothers and sisters went into the woods to gather prim-roses. Alice stood at the door to watch them go; and when she went in, she called her pet, but it did not come. But as it was about the middle of the day, she thought it was gone to perch in the dark corner.

When Alice had sat a long time at her work, as her pretty favourite did not come to her, she went to look for it. But she did not find it in the

house, so she went into the garden, and looked among the salad beds, where it liked to go and feed; but no, it was not there.

At last she chanced to look up to a fir-tree that grew in the corner of the garden, and there in the dark branches she saw the woodpigeon. Alice called it and it soon came down to her; she carried it into the house, and fed it and called it by all her prettiest pet names. It had never flown up into the high fir-tree before, and she felt as if she were going to lose it. "Perhaps it will fly away to the woods some day, and never come back," she thought; "and then I shall be lonely again."

When Alice's brothers and sisters came in that day, and told her about the pleasant afternoon they had spent in the woods, she was very quiet, and did not ask them so many questions as she sometimes did. Her eldest brother sat down by her, and said—"You cannot think, Alice, how lively it was in the wood: the little birds were sporting about, and chasing each other among the new leaves; the tomtits had so many different calls and cries, they quite puzzled us; then we

heard the cuckoo, and saw a pair of woodpigeons building in the low branch of a tree."

Alice looked up where her pet was perching, and all at once she thought—"Perhaps it feels lonely here, without a mate, in the pleasant spring;" but she did not like to think that, so she tried to believe that the woodpigeon was too fond of her ever to leave her.

That night, when Alice went to bed, she dreamed that she was in the woods, and that the wind blew softly through the trees, and that she heard the sweet cooing of the woodpigeons over her head; and when she got up, she almost wondered to see her pet fly to her to be fed.

As the days of spring went by, the woodpigeon flew oftener into the boughs of the fir; but still Alice did not put it into a cage to keep it, for she was not a selfish little girl—and she thought "If it feels happier to go away, I will let it go."

One morning very early, Alice was awakened by the pigeon tapping against the window-pane—it seemed very restless, and anxious to get out. Alice got up and took the bird in her hands, and kissed its pretty head, and stroked its smooth

feathers; and then she opened the window, and said "Good bye;" and the pigeon flew out into the fir-tree, but it did not stay there long—it soon spread its wings, and flew away towards the woods.

Then Alice lay down again, and the tears came into her eyes; for she was sure that she should never see her favourite again.

But in the evening, when her brothers missed the woodpigeon, and asked her where it was, she smiled, and said—"I have let it go, to be happy in the woods; I am glad that I did not force it to stay."

THE OATMEAL PORRIDGE.

THE porridge is ready; come, children, and eat.
First say your grace,—

“All eyes wait upon Thee, oh Lord.”

Eat then, children, and God bless the food, that
ye may grow and thrive.

You know that your father sowed the oats with
busy hand, in the furrow, and harrowed it care-
fully in the spring; but to make it grow, was the
work of your Father in heaven.

Think, children, in the mealy grain there is
hidden a tiny tender germ; you cannot hear it
breathe—no, it sleeps quietly, it neither eats nor
drinks, until it is laid in the light mould of the
furrow.

Then in the warm moisture it awakes from its
silent sleep, and stretches itself and feeds on the

juicy grain, almost like a baby, only it never cries.

In time it grows larger and stronger, and ever more beautiful in secret; it slips out of its swaddling clothes, and stretches its little root downwards, and looks for food and finds it.

And then it grows curious, and longs to know what is to be seen above ground. Very softly and gently it peeps up out of the mould, and oh! how delighted it is!

God sees it, and sends down an angel with a dewdrop and a kind welcome. It drinks the dew and stretches itself luxuriously. Then the cheerful sun comes out behind the mountain, and goes her way on the heavenly high road; she knits, and looks down as a loving mother looks on her children. She smiles to the little germ, and it does it good, down to the very root. Oh, how beautiful the sun is, and yet so kind and so friendly!

What is she knitting? Clouds out of heavenly vapours. Is it not beginning to rain already? First drops, then a shower, and now heavy rain.

The little germ drinks to its heart's content,

and a breeze blows and dries it, and it says—
“Now, I would not go back underground for anything. I will stay and see what becomes of me.”

Eat, my children, and God bless the food, that ye may grow and thrive. There is a sad time to come for the little germ. Clouds are in the sky, by day and by night, and the sun is hidden. There is snow on the hills and the hail falls; oh, how the little germ trembles and shivers! The ground is frozen, and there is but scanty nourishment for it. It asks—“Is the sun dead, or why does she never appear? or is she afraid of the cold, too? I wish I had stayed where I came from, safe in the mealy grain, at home in the warm moist earth.”

See, children, so it is. You will say so yourselves, when you have to leave home and work at a distance, and know care, and earn your bread and your clothing. “I wish I were at home with my mother again!” God comfort ye then. There is an end to that trouble, and all things grow brighter; and so they did with the germ.

In the bright days of May, the wind blew so

softly, and the sun rose in strength behind the hill, and looked down on the germ, and kissed it tenderly—and it felt so happy, it did not know how to contain its joy.

By degrees, the meadows are full of grass and of flowers; the cherry blossom is fragrant, and the plum-tree is covered with leaves. The rye is in ear first, and then the wheat and the barley; and the little oat plant says—"I must not be left behind, either." It spreads out the blades—who has woven them? the stem shoots higher—who sends up the sap through the delicate veins from the root to the crown? At last, out slips the ear, and rocks in the breeze—can any one tell me who hung the tiny buds on their silken threads? Angels, surely, none else. They pass to and fro in the furrows from blade to blade most busily.

Now the blossoms hang side by side on the graceful waving ear, and the little oat plant stands like a bride adorned for the altar. Now there are tender grains within, that grow larger in secret, and the little plant perceives how things are to be.

Little insects and flies come to visit it, and sing soft lullabies; the glow-worm comes with its lamp

every evening at nine, when the flies and the beetles are sleeping.

Eat, children, and God bless the food, that ye may grow and thrive. Now the hay is made, and the cherries are gathered at Whitsuntide. The plum-trees in the garden have been shaken. The rye is reaped, and the wheat and the barley, and the children have been gleaning barefoot among the stubble; and the little field mouse has taken her share.

And now, at last, the oats are bleached also. Full of mealy grains, the ear bows down, and says "Now I am weary of life; I feel that my time is come. What can I do here alone, among turnips and winter potatoes?"

Then mother went out with the girls (the mornings already were frosty), and so at last it was brought in to the dusty barn, and threshed from two in the morning until four in the afternoon. Then the miller's ass came and took it away to the mill, and brought it home again, ground into meal; and with sweet new milk from the dappled cow, mother has boiled it for porridge to-day. Was it not good so?

Now say your grace, and away to school. Your books are there on the mantelshelf, ready. Take care that none stumble; be good at your lessons, and when you come home, I have some dried plums to give you.



THE FIELD POPPY AND THE WILD BEE.

A POPPY once grew in a large corn-field, it had one scarlet flower that hung its head from the hairy stem. I do not think any little children saw the poppy, because it grew among the tall corn, but there was one little creature that found it out.

It was a little black bee, hardly more than a barley-corn long, with rings of grey round its body, and grey silken hair underneath. This little wild bee did not live in a hive with other bees, but made a nest of her own.

First she dug out a hole in the side of the foot-path that crossed the corn field, and made it quite smooth inside. Then she wanted something to line it with, before she laid her egg in it. She

flew away, and when she came to the poppy, she settled on the scarlet leaves—they were just what she wanted.

So she cut off small pieces of the leaf, and carried them away to her nest. She cut the leaf with her jaws, and held it between her feet. When she got to the nest, she laid a piece in at the bottom, and then another and another, so that there were three folds of leaves; then she laid two folds on the sides. If a piece of the leaf did not quite fit, she cut it into shape, and carried away all the little shreds. If you were to cut the leaves of a poppy with your scissors, you would find that they look crumpled and shrivelled; but the little bee knew how to spread the pieces as smooth as glass.

When the whole nest was lined, she put some of the scarlet leaf around the door as well, for she did not spare her trouble; and then she set about getting a store of food for the young bee, which was to live in the nest by and bye. For this she flew to the flowers, and sucked the sweet honey from them, and mixed it with the fine dust that lies upon them, and then she stored it up in her nest. When she had brought enough, she laid an

egg in the nest; so that the young bee, when it was hatched, might eat the sweet food. Then she laid folds of the poppy leaf over it, and last of all she covered it with earth, so that no one might notice the door of her nest.

Is it not wonderful that a little black bee should work so hard to make a pretty safe cradle for her young one?



THE ROBIN'S NEST.

A LADY once went to stay at a house in the country, where there was a large garden. The master was planting new flowers in the beds, and laying down fresh turf for the lawn.

When the gardener took away the old turf, he found a robin's nest with four eggs, in the grass; he took it up very carefully, and carried it to another part of the lawn, which was finished. The robin watched him all the time; and when he had made a nice round hole in the grass, and left the nest in it, the robin flew down and settled herself on the eggs; they had not had time to get cold. The lawn was just in front of the house; but the robin was not afraid, for the gentleman who lived there had no little children to come and play on the grass, and the servants were all kind people.

The lady went close to the nest, walking very gently, and the robin did not fly off.

Before the lady went to bed in the large house, she looked out of the window: it was too dark to see the little robin, but she heard the nightingales singing in the trees, some on one side of the house, and some on the other. The night was very still, there was no wind, and no sound of rushing water—only this sweet singing in the dark.

The next morning the lady went out to see if the robin was upon her nest, and she found her there, quite safe and happy, with her mate singing at her side.



THE CRICKETS.

"THERE, mama, I have finished my stockings," said Emily; "may I take them to Sarah to be washed?"

"Yes—do so, my dear," said mama.

So Emily went to the kitchen, and asked Sarah to wash them that night, because she wanted to give them to a poor little girl the next day; and Sarah promised to do so.

The next morning Emily ran to fetch her nice white woollen stockings; they were hanging on a chair near the fire, quite dry; so she took them and drew them over her arm, intending to turn and fold them. But what was her surprise to find them full of holes!

She was ready to cry, and ran to her mama, to show them to her.

Her mother looked at them, and said—"The crickets must have done this—it is a pity, indeed "

"The crickets!" cried Emily, for she could hardly believe the merry chirping crickets she liked so much could have done her such mischief.

"Yes," said her mama; "they are thirsty little creatures, from living in such a warm place, when we are all gone to bed, they come out, young and old, to look for something to drink, either water or milk, or anything they can find. Last night, I suppose, they found nothing but your wet woollen stockings, and so they gnawed them into holes."

I wish I had known," said Emily, "I would have given them a saucerful of milk, and saved my new stockings."

"A saucerful would have been rather too much," answered her mama; and most likely they would have drowned themselves in it, as often happens."

"What do crickets eat?" asked Emily.

"They will eat bread crumbs, and little bits of any sort of food they find about the kitchen," said her mama; "for they are very hungry, as well as thirsty, little creatures. Some of the crickets

have wings, and fly about the houses, and out of the windows, in the summer evenings. They like best to live in new houses, where the walls are not quite dry; and then they make burrows in the mortar, and so can pass from one room to the other. They spend very comfortable lives, I should think, by the kitchen fires and bakers' ovens; but still, they are often caught by the cat, who plays with them and kills them, just as she does a mouse.

"There are two kinds of crickets that live out of doors: one is called the field-cricket; it is very shy, and always leaves off chirping when it hears a footstep come near, and runs backward very nimbly into its burrow, until the danger is past. This cricket is shining black, with a gold stripe across its shoulders; it feeds on the plants that grow near its hole, and likes to live alone.

"The other cricket is called the mole-cricket, because it burrows and works underground, like a mole; it likes to live in damp meadows, and by the sides of pools and streams. When it gets into a garden, it will eat whole beds of vegetables and flowers. In the beginning of May, it lays its eggs

in a safe little chamber underground, with long winding ways leading to it."

"I should like to see the black cricket with the gold stripe," said Emily.

"He must be a gay little fellow," said her mama; "but he is not very commonly seen, except in some parts of England, in the dry sunny fields; and besides, you might chance to find only his mate, and she is much duskier in colour than he."

Emily was so glad to hear about the crickets, and how they lived, that she almost forgot the holes in her stockings.



THE RABBITS.

HENRY had some pet rabbits, and he was very fond of them. He had a nice dry place for them to sleep in, with plenty of clean straw for their beds, and an open court for them to run about in when they liked.

Henry was very careful to keep the place clean, and to feed them every day at the proper hour; he knew what was good for them every day, and what they might have now and then for a treat. He fed them with cabbages and lettuces, and oat-meal mixed with bran or potatoes; and gave them a little parsley, or a few carrots, or apple-parings, now and then.

One of the rabbits was very tame, and that was the favourite. Sometimes Henry brought her a few strawberries, and he always laughed to see



THE RABBITS.

her eat the strawberry and drop the green part; he could not think, as she eat so many green things every day, why she could not eat the stalk of the strawberry as well.

In the spring Henry used to go out in the lanes, and gather the young leaves of the dandelions and the docks for his rabbits, and he was very glad when any one showed him a plant that was good for them. He was very careful, too, not to give them the leaves when they were wet with rain, for he knew that would make them ill.

Once Henry had a great pleasure—he noticed that his pet rabbit ran about very busily, gathering up hay and straw, and biting it into short pieces, and then carried them into the warmest corner of the house, and began to make a nest there. After that was done, she tore off the soft white fur from her own breast, and carried it in mouthful to the nest, and made a warm lining with it. The nest was so deep and so warm, Henry was quite delighted to think of the young ones lying in it.

After a few days, the old rabbit stayed in the nest a good deal, and only came out now and then, to get some food—so Henry was sure she had

young ones to take care of; but though he longed to see them, he did not disturb them, for he knew they were very tender creatures, and ought to be kept warm. Besides, he had been told that if he disturbed the mother whilst they were young, she might grow so frightened that she would not take care of them, or bring them up.

When the young ones came out at last, they were the prettiest little black and white things. They hopped about their mother, and put up their little feet on her soft fur; and Henry never grew tired of watching them. He spent a good deal of his play-time with the rabbits, and always wished his friends to see them.

One day his aunt Ellen came on a visit, and he soon began to tell her about the rabbits, and most about the pet, which he called "Lizzie."

"Do come and see her," said Henry.

"Cannot you wait a little?" said aunt Ellen.

"I will go by and bye."

But Henry was impatient, and said—

"I will go and fetch Lizzie—she is quite tame, and then you can see her at once."

"No, no," said aunt Ellen, "I cannot allow

you to do that; I would rather go with you now."

So Henry took her to see Lizzie and the young ones, and told her all about them.

When they went in again, Henry asked aunt Ellen why she would not let him bring the rabbit into the house; and she said—

"I do not like to see rabbits carried about, because I know that they are very easily hurt, and even killed. I will tell you what once happened to a pet rabbit.

"I went one day to a cottage, to see some little girls; when I came in, they were sitting at work mending their stockings. They soon began to tell me about a beautiful white rabbit which they had for a pet; they said it was tamer and prettier than any rabbit they had ever seen. At last the eldest girl threw down her work, and ran out: she brought the white rabbit back in her arms; she held it by the ears, in the proper manner, and put her other hand under it. She asked me to stroke it, and the other children came round to pet and feed it, as it sat in her lap.

"After a time, she wanted to show me some

knitting which she had done at school; and she turned to a large arm-chair that stood close by, and put down the rabbit on the cushion: she thought it would be quite safe, and very comfortable there, until she took it out to its house again.

“But instead of that, the poor rabbit struggled on the chair, as if it had gone into a fit, and then fell on the floor. The children ran to take it up, and tried to find out what was the matter with it. One of them ran to fetch some water, and wanted it to drink; but it was of no use—in a minute or two more it lay still, and did not even breathe—for it was dead.

“The poor children were so sorry and so frightened, they began to cry sadly. Then I took up the rabbit, and looked very carefully all over it, and found out what had killed it: the long darning-needle that Sarah had been mending her stockings with, had run into its little heart. There was not a single drop of blood on the white fur, and yet it was quite dead! Poor Sarah cried more when she found that her careless way of throwing down her work had caused such a sad accident.

"When her sisters saw how very sorry she was, they tried to leave off crying; and one of them ran to ask their father to come and take the dead rabbit away."

"Poor little white rabbit!" said Henry.

"Well," said aunt Ellen, "after this day, I never liked to see children carry their pets about out of the proper places; and that is why I would not let you bring Lizzie into the parlour."



THE EARWIG.

LITTLE Agnes was very busy and very happy—she was putting some flowers into a glass of water. She was very fond of flowers, and took up each and looked at it and smelt it, before she put it into the glass.

All at once she jumped away from the table, and cried out—“ Oh, mama! a horrid earwig! do take it away—I can't bear it!” and a great many words of that sort.

Mama looked up from her work, and said—“ If you think the earwig horrid, why do you wish *me* to touch it?”

Agnes did not know what to think about it at first, but at last she said—“ Perhaps you do not mind, mama—do you?”

Her mama said—“ No, I do not mind, Agnes;

so I will take it in my hand, and put it out of the window."

Agnes watched her mama whilst she did it, and then said—"Earwigs are ugly, I think; and the gardener says that they eat the carnations."

"The earwig is not pretty, like a butterfly," answered her mama; "but I do not like to hear you say that it is *horrid*. I have read something about it that would make you like it, I am sure."

"Oh, what can that be?" said Agnes. "Nurse told me something about earwigs, but it was not nice at all."

"I will tell you," said her mama. "The earwig, though it looks so ugly, is as fond of her young ones, and takes as much care of them, as a hen does of her chickens. She sits over them, and keeps them warm, and cares for them a long time after they are hatched."

"Will an ugly brown earwig do that?" said Agnes, and she was astonished.

"Yes," said her mama; "it is true, indeed. There is something good and wonderful to be learnt about all God's creatures, though a little girl like you thinks them horrid."

"I will not say it again," said Agnes. And when she saw an insect that she could not think pretty, she said to herself—"I wonder if mama could tell me a story about that, as she did about the earwig?"



THE GREBES.

ONE summer a pair of little birds, called grebes, came to the sea-side of Scotland; they were funny looking little birds, with webbed feet, and very short tails and wings.

These little grebes chose a small lake for their home, and began to make a nest in a tuft of rushes, that grew near the edge of the water, where it was shallow.

First, the grebes gathered up a good many bits of dead rushes that were floating about; it was pretty to see them swimming about and helping each other to do this, and laying them in a heap on the tuft of rushes.

When they had made it large enough, they dived to the bottom of the lake, and brought up bunches of weeds that grew there, and laid them

on the dead rushes; and then they shaped it all into a nest. They worked in the morning and late in the evening, but not in the middle of the day.

After a few days had passed, one of the grebes laid six white eggs in the wet nest. It was always wet, because it was made on a tuft of rushes that grew in the water.

The little mother grebe sat on the eggs to hatch them; but she often left them in the day-time, to go and play about in the water with her mate. Whenever she left the nest, she covered the eggs very carefully with wet weeds, which she brought from the bottom of the lake; so at last, the white eggs looked quite dirty.

In a fortnight, six little grebes were hatched from the eggs; they were very tiny, odd looking little things, but they swam about, and seemed as happy in the water as the old ones.

On windy days, when the water was too rough for them, the old grebes took them into a sheltered corner of the little lake behind an old floating rail. They were not shy, but would swim close to any one who was watching them, and then dive and

stay under water a good while. Then they would pop up again, and perhaps turn half over in the water, to scratch their necks with one foot—then shake their tiny wings, and dip under again.

But if a dog jumped into the water for a swim, they were much frightened, and dived and came up again quite at the other side of the water—and then only just showed the tips of their bills above it, until they were sure that the dog was gone.

When the young ones were full-grown, all the grebes went away for the winter.



THE COCKCHAFER.

EMILY saw a large beetle eating the leaves of an oak tree. Its wings were covered with brown wing-cases, but sometimes it raised the cases and unfolded its wings, and flew about the tree. Its wings moved very quickly, and made a humming noise.

Emily's mama told her that the beetle was called a cockchafer. Then Emily wanted to know what a cockchafer looked like when it was young: she thought it would be a tiny beetle, with wings and wing-cases like the old one.

But her mama said—"No, the cockchafers come from eggs, at first. The mother makes a hole in the earth of a grassy field, and lays a great many little yellow eggs in it. A little creature creeps out of each egg—not a little beetle with wings,

but a soft grub with short feet. It lives in the earth, and eats the roots of the grass. It grows larger, and sometimes changes its skin; and in the winter it goes deeper into the earth, and lies still, without eating.

“At last, in the third autumn after it is hatched, it digs down very far into the earth, and then it does not eat any more, or move any more. Then it is called a chrysalis; and all the time it lies so, it is being slowly changed into a beetle with wings and brown wing-cases.

“When February comes, there is a cockchafer in the hole where the chrysalis lay so long; but its body is quite soft, and it does not creep out of the earth until May, when it has grown strong and hard, and able to fly about the trees. Do not you think it must enjoy itself in the sunshine, after living so long underground?

“When the farmer ploughs his fields, he often turns up a great many of the cockchafer grubs: he does not like them to live in his fields, because they eat the roots of the grass and the plants. But the crows and wagtails are very glad; they follow the plough, and eat all the grubs they can find.”

"I should like to see one of the grubs," said Emily.

"I once saw a great many of them," answered her mama, "it was when your brother was a very little boy. He went out with John to plough, and seeing a number of white things in the furrow as he went along, he picked his pinafore full of them, and then came running to me, crying out—" See, mama, what nice things I have got;" and when I expected to see some flowers, or little stones, he poured all the white grubs into my lap."

"That was not very pleasant," said Emily; but she could not help laughing.



THE THREE FLOWERS.

THERE was once a little plant that grew by the roadside. The road led into a village, and the plant grew very near the first house of the street.

In the spring, the little plant had three buds—only three.

The first bud came out in the morning; its leaves were white, and it looked like a small white star. But before it was quite blown, a black cloud came across the sky, and a heavy hail shower fell and beat upon the little plant, and broke the stem of the young flower, and bruised its pretty leaves. And when the sun came out again, the little plant looked dull and sad.

It was a good while before the second bud was blown. It was at noon, and there was a fair in the village, and the sun shone brightly. The

flower looked as pretty as any flower could look; but the feet of the horses and cows that were driven to the fair, raised clouds of dust, and it fell on the white leaves of the flower and choked them, so that you could see no beauty in them; and again the little plant looked dull and sad.

It was near the end of summer when the third bud came out, and it was the last. It did not open till towards evening, and the setting sun shone upon it, and made it look bright and beautiful.

The road was very still, for it was after the time when the workmen go to their homes.

A little girl came out at a cottage door, and an old woman leant upon her shoulder; she was very weak, and looked down on the ground as she walked.

But the little girl had bright eyes, that looked all about her. She was thinking of her companions—they had all gone into the woods to gather flowers and strawberries.

The little girl had stayed at home to take care of the weak old woman, and to help her to take a short walk on the road.

She thought she should not see any flowers, and when she found out the pretty, shining white one, she stooped and put down her hand to gather it.

But then she thought how beautiful it would look when the moon came out; so she drew back her hand and only smiled at it, and then she went on with the lame old woman, smiling to herself.

And the little plant looked happy all that moonlight night—with its white, full-blown blossom.



THE CADDIS-WORMS.

ONE fine summer day, Emily went out to walk on the bank of the river with her mama. Emily asked whether she might go down to the edge of the stream. Her mama told her that she might, and said she would sit under the trees and read while she played there. So Emily ran down and amused herself by throwing pebbles into the water.

In a little while she grew tired and sat down, and began to lift up some of the stones that lay just at the edge of the stream, and even quite in the water.

Presently she found what she called a curious little case, made up of the tiniest bits of gravel; so neat and close, she wondered how it could possibly be made. It was not more than an inch long, and not thicker than a straw.

Emily lifted up more of the stones, and found more curious little cases. They were not all alike; some were made of bits of reeds and rushes, some of little shells, and some of sand wonderfully joined together.

Emily thought, when she had gathered a good many, she would take them to her mama and ask her what they were; but when she took them up in her hand, she was startled to see them moving. There must be something living in the cases!

When she looked closer, she saw a little head peeping out, and part of a body and some legs; and the creature struggled to get along, dragging its house with it, though it moved but slowly.

Emily went at once to her mama, to ask her the name of these curious creatures that carried their houses about with them almost like the snails.

"They are called caddis-worms," said mama.

"But how did the worms get these pretty little houses, mama?" asked Emily.

Her mama told her that each little worm, soon after it was hatched, made its own house, patiently gathering all the tiny stones or bits of straw and

fitting them together; and that it lined it with a sort of silk, to make the inside smooth for its soft body.

There it lived for some time, and could crawl about at the bottom of the stream, and upon the water-plants, and even row itself on the water.

"What does it eat, mama?" asked Emily.

"It eats the leaves of the water-plants, and some kinds of little worms," said her mama.

"Will it always live in the house?" said Emily.

"No," answered her mama, "when it is full grown, it fastens its house to some large stone by threads, and then closes the end of it with threads spun across and across, like a little net, through which the water can pass.

"Then it lies still for a good many days, and is changed into a chrysalis.

"Then comes the last change; it cuts the threads of the network, and creeps out of the water into a sunny place, and dries itself; and at last the case splits open, and out creeps a pretty fly, with brown spotted wings, and soon flies away."

"Thank you, mama," said Emily, for she was always very glad when her mama told her anything about insects.

THE SHEEP-SHEARING.

FANNY spent all the summer with her aunt, and she saw a great many things that pleased her very much, and which she could not see at her own home in the town.

One day when it was very fine and hot—I think it was in July—Fanny made haste to finish her work, and then went to look for her cousin Henry, for she wanted him to play with her.

Fanny looked in all the rooms, and in the garden, and called him as loud as she could; but he did not come. So she went to her aunt, and said—“If you please, can you tell me where my cousin is?”

“He is gone to the sheep-shearing,” answered her aunt.

Fanny looked as if she did not know what sheep-shearing meant, and her aunt said—

"I mean that he is gone to see the wool cut off the backs of the sheep."

Fanny said—"I should like to see it, too."

"Wait until I have put away this tea and sugar," said her aunt, "and then I will take you to see the sheep shorn."

Fanny was very glad when she heard this, and she hoped her aunt would be quick in putting away the groceries; and she stood waiting in the store-room by her.

Her aunt went on weighing the tea without speaking, and Fanny grew tired of doing nothing, and said—"Cannot I help you, aunt?"

"No, my dear," she replied, "you cannot help me; but there is no reason why you should be idle until I am ready to take you out."

Fanny thought for a moment, and then said—"I know what I will do—I will mend my glove; there is a hole in the thumb."

Her aunt nodded, and Fanny ran away to the parlour, and sat down to mend her glove.

When she had finished, and was putting her thimble away, her aunt came in, and said—"I am going to put on my bonnet now."

Fanny made haste after her, and soon they set out together, and walked to the farm-yard, where the men were shearing the sheep.

Before they got there, Fanny heard the sheep bleating very loud; and presently they came to a pen, in which a great many sheep and lambs were crowded together.

They went on into a large yard, where they saw a good many men sitting, with great scissors in their hands; and Fanny's aunt told her that they were called shears.

Some boys went to the pens, and caught hold of the old sheep, one after another, and tied their feet together, and then laid them down on the benches before the men.

The sheep lay quite still whilst their thick wool was cut off, and Fanny was very glad to hear that it did not hurt them, still she thought they would be glad when it was all over and they might go back to the fields.

Fanny knew that the wool of sheep was used to make cloth and flannel of, but she had never thought how bare and cold the sheep would look when it was taken from them.

She asked whether it was not cruel to shear them, but her aunt said—

“It is not cruel, for God lets so much wool grow on the sheep that it can spare some to us, and we only shear it in the summer, when the weather is warm, so the sheep do not feel cold.”

Fanny felt glad to hear this, and she was pleased when she saw that the men did not cut off the curly white wool from the lambs, as they were too young to be shorn.

Just then Henry came to them, looking very hot, for he had been out in the sun all the day.

“I looked for you a long time before we came here,” said Fanny.

“I came here directly after breakfast,” answered Henry. “Yesterday, I saw the sheep washed in a pool in the river; one or two of them got away from the men, and swam across the stream to the little wood. The lambs stayed bleating on the shore, and as the mothers came out they ran about calling to their young ones, and trying to find them out among the crowd.”

Fanny did not know that sheep could swim, until Henry told her this.

They stayed a little longer in the farm-yard, and saw the sheep marked with letters of red and black paint; and then they went home.

Henry would have liked to stay and see the men at their supper, but his mama said she did not wish it; and as he was a good boy, he did not ask her again, but went home cheerfully with the others.

In the evening Fanny's aunt gave her a book, in which she found a great deal about sheep of different kinds.

Fanny read aloud to Henry about the mountain sheep in Wales and the north of England; which climb about the rocks, and sometimes get into steep places, or fall into holes and cannot get back again. And how the shepherds go up the mountains to see if they are all safe, and take dogs with them, who run about and find the lost sheep, and help the shepherds to save them.

Then she read about the fat, quiet, south country sheep, that live in fields and on downs, and would not like to climb rocks at all. They follow one large sheep that has a bell tied round his neck, going tinkle, tinkle, all the day long.

Henry said he liked the active mountain sheep the best, that climbed the rocks so well, and nibbled the heath and short grass so close; but Fanny liked the large, quiet sheep, because she thought they would be tame, and perhaps let her stroke their little lambs. Afterwards, she read about curious sheep that live in other countries; and when they had done, Fanny put the book in its place.



THE CATERPILLARS.

HENRY had a garden of his own, with currant and gooseberry bushes in it. One day he asked his cousin Fanny to go with him, to look at his gooseberries, and see whether they were large enough to be gathered for a pie.

When they came to the bushes, they found them full of little green caterpillars: they were eating the leaves as fast as they could, so that the gooseberry bushes began to look quite ragged and bare.

Henry was very sorry to see this, and he began to pick off the caterpillars, one by one, to save the rest of the leaves. He knew that the fruit would not ripen well on a tree without leaves.

Fanny was sorry too; and as she was a good-natured little girl, she said she would help Henry,

though she did not much like touching the caterpillars.

Presently they grew tired of their work and Henry said, "I do not like these mischievous caterpillars, I do not like any caterpillars at all."

Then he ran to get a basket and they both gathered a good many gooseberries and took them into the house, and sat down to nip off the stalks to make them ready for a pie.

Whilst they were doing this, Fanny said, "I like *some* caterpillars, I like silkworms, and they are a kind of caterpillar you know."

"I never saw any silkworms," answered Henry, "did you ever see any?"

Fanny told him that she once had some silkworms that spun real silk, such as silk dresses and stockings are made of, and that her mama had given her some tiny eggs, and told her to keep them in a paper tray in a warm place.

"And were the little eggs hatched?" asked Henry.

"Yes, they were hatched in a few days," said Fanny; "the tray was full of small black caterpillars, and mama taught me to feed them with

lettuce leaves. They grew bigger and bigger, and sometimes their skins came off, and they had new ones underneath; and the colour was lighter each time, until they were nearly white.

“When they were full-grown they left off eating, and crept into the corners of the tray, and began to spin threads of silk from their mouths.

“They spun the silk round and round themselves, until they were quite shut in, and you could see nothing but a ball of yellow silk. Do you know that I was quite disappointed, when I found all the silk was *yellow*. I thought some would be red, and some blue, and some green; but I was only a very little girl, and I did not know anything about dyeing. The ball of silk is called a cocoon, and the silk-worm stays in it about three weeks. Its skin falls off, and it is changed into a chrysalis, without head or feet; and there it lies, neither moving nor eating, in the egg-shaped cocoon.

“But it does not die: at the end of the three weeks, a white moth with four wings creeps out of the cocoon.”

“The caterpillars I have seen in the garden

change in the same way," said Henry; "but they do not spin much silk, I think."

"Mama has told me," answered Fanny, "that all the butterflies and moths were once chrysalides and once caterpillars, and that some insects have even more wonderful changes than these."

Henry said that it was something like seeing beautiful flowers and fruit growing from seeds smaller than pin's heads. And whilst they were wondering what kind of insect the green caterpillars on the gooseberry bushes would become, they were called away to tea.

THE YOUNG BIRDS.

EDWIN was once walking out by himself, when he saw something move in the grass. It was two young birds, with pretty speckled feathers and bright eyes. They seemed as if they had just come out of the nest, for they fluttered their wings and opened their yellow throats, as if they wanted to be fed.

Edwin looked about to see whether their mother was near, but he did not see her. Then he thought he should like to take the young birds home and keep them; he was sure his sister Mary would tell him how to feed them.

He caught them easily, for they were weak, and could not fly far. He put them into his cap, that they might not be hurt, and walked home.

As soon as he got into the house, he went to his sister, and said—"Look, Mary! what beautiful little birds I have brought! Will you help me to feed them?"

Mary looked at them, and said—"They are very pretty, indeed, but I am afraid we cannot feed them."

"Give them some bread-crumbs," said Edwin.

"Bread-crumbs will not do," answered Mary; "for these birds are young linnets, I believe, and they live upon insects."

"Oh, dear," said Edward, "what shall we do? They look so hungry—see how they gape!"

"Let us put them in a cage at once," said Mary, "that they may be safe from the cat." And she fetched an empty bird-cage, and put the linnets in it.

They did not seem to like it, for they fluttered against the bars, and tried to get out. Edwin did not like to see it. "I wish they would be still," he said; "they will hurt themselves."

Whilst Edwin was watching them, Mary boiled an egg, and chopped it very fine, and brought some of it, to try if the young birds would eat

it, but they would not touch a bit. One of them sat on a perch, and made a sad chirping noise, and the other still fluttered and tried to get out.

Then Edwin went to the window and looked out; he began to feel sorry that he had brought the birds. He chanced to see a dead fly lying on the window-sill, and he carried it to the birds, but they would not eat it.

It was getting late, and Mary said—"Perhaps if we put a cloth over the cage, the birds will think it is night, and go to sleep."

Edwin was glad to do it, and in a few minutes the birds were quiet; there was no more fluttering and no more chirping. It was now Edwin's bed-time, and he went up stairs.

He awoke very early the next morning, and went down stairs to look at the birds. They were both alive, but they had not eaten anything, and they fluttered and chirped just as they did the night before. Edwin did not know what to do; he wished that Mary would get up.

Now Mary had been thinking about the poor hungry nestlings, and just then she came in and bid Edwin good morning.

"The birds are as hungry as ever, I suppose," said Edwin, sadly, "for they have not eaten anything. I wish they were safe with their mother again."

"Let us take them back then," said Mary, "I am sure the mother is waiting for them."

"Perhaps she has forgotten them," said Edwin.

"Oh no," said Mary, "mothers do not forget so soon, let us try."

"Very well," said Edwin, "we will;" and he took up the cage and Mary ran for her bonnet, and gave him his cap, and then they set out together.

"Shew me the very place where you found them," said Mary. Edwin shewed her the grassy spot among the hazel bushes, and there Mary opened the door of the cage, and let the young birds hop out. Then she and Edwin went to a little distance and watched.

The young birds chirped loudly, and in a few minutes an old linnet flew down from the bushes to them. The young birds fluttered their wings in a pleased manner, and opened their beaks. They did not look at all as they did when they were in the cage!

The mother linnet, for it was really the good mother, was delighted to see them, and after carressing them with her beak, as if she was kissing them, she flew away for a few moments, and came back with some food for them.

When Edwin saw how happy the old bird was with her nestlings, he looked at Mary and whispered, "I will never take young birds away from their mothers again." And Mary smiled, and gave her little brother a kiss.



THE SNAKE.

Ан, here is a snake curled up among the leaves. It seems to be asleep, let us watch it awhile without fear.

It is a harmless one, it has no poisonous teeth, only a forked tongue and double row of little teeth, with which it holds its food. It feeds upon frogs and lizards, and small mice.

If you were to take it home and feed it, it would become tame and learn to know you; it would nestle up your sleeve and hide there from strangers. You would not like such a pet, you say? Well, I am sure the snake would much rather be left here upon the bank.

Look at the colour, it is brownish gray, and there are yellow spots upon the neck, and rows of black spots down the back and the sides. The

snake changes that pretty skin several times in the summer, it strips it off among the thorns, and there is a beautiful new one underneath. The snake lays her eggs in a sunny place that they may be hatched. When the summer is over, and cold weather comes, the snake hides in the earth, or under little heaps of fallen leaves, and sleeps. See, now it uncoils itself; it glides away towards the water. It can swim very well, and will soon be out of sight.



A GORSE HEDGE IN SEPTEMBER.

"Do let us go into the wood to-day, papa," said Edward; "I want so much to get some nuts."

"I cannot go to the wood now," replied his papa, "for I have some business in the village." And as he spoke he turned into a long lane, which had tall gorse hedges on each side of it.

"But papa, I do not like that walk," said Edward; "there is nothing to be seen up that long, dull lane."

"Come along cheerfully, Edward," said his papa, "and I think you will find that you are mistaken."

Edward walked on at his father's side; he felt vexed and disappointed, and did not intend to look about him at all. However, it was not very long, before he caught sight of a bunch of blackberries,

with the sun shining on them. The brambles grew up among the gorse, and sent out their branches far above the bushes that they clung to, and many of the blackberries were quite out of the reach of little children. But Edward found that by getting up the bank, he could just reach the bunch he wished for.

"One, two, three, four—oh, more than I can count!" cried he, "and each berry looks like a tiny bunch of grapes. I wonder that I forgot the blackberries!"

As Edward put out his hand to take the spray, he brushed against a spider's web; he did not think much about it, except to wonder whether the spider knew anything about blackberries, and expected the flies to come more readily into her net, if she spread it out before them.

As he went on slowly, looking for more fine bunches of blackberries, he could not help seeing that the spiders had been busy in the hedge that morning; for there were numbers of new, perfect webs stretched among the spiny boughs of the gorse—all regularly spun, and beautifully fine and silky, and glistening in the sun.

In a little opening in the middle of the web, Edward saw the patient spider keeping watch; and he stopped to put a tiny blade of grass into her net, that he might see her pounce down on it, taking it for a fly. This the spider was sure to do; but when she found out her mistake, she carefully took out the bit of grass, without breaking her web, and let it fall to the ground. Then she ran up again to her den, to watch for a real fly.

Edward walked on, but before he came up with his papa, he saw a branch of flowering honeysuckle waving above the gorse.

Honeysuckles are always sweet and pleasant, but they seemed more precious now, when so many of the wild flowers were dead; and Edward stayed to gather the branch, and to find out where it sprung from. It was some time before he could trace the bare stems of the plant up through the gorse. He soon felt obliged to say in his own mind—"This part of the hedge is not dull;" for just below the honeysuckle, he espied the bright berries of the woody nightshade, drooping in clusters over their dark leaves and purple stems, and lower still, grew pink crane's-bill, and scarlet

pimpernel, and a little gray fungus like a fairy's hat.

While Edward lingered, looking at these things, cock-robin perched upon a naked bough, and looked at him with his friendly large dark eyes, and the little brown wren hurried past with a loud note, and hid herself in the other side of the hedge. Nor was this all; for the larks rose high over the stubble field, and sang as sweet, if not as loud, a song as ever they did in the early spring.

When Edward at last looked up the lane, his father was almost out of sight.

"What will papa say?" thought he; but no one could be ill-humoured after seeing such beautiful, such happy things. So he ran after his papa; and when he came up to him, took hold of his hand, and looked smilingly in his face.

"What has kept you so long by the dull gorse hedge?" asked his papa.

"Oh, papa—it was the blackberries, and the honeysuckles, and the spider's web, and the little flowers, and the singing of the birds. I know now that the gorse hedge is not dull in September."

THE WHITE OWLS.

THERE was once a pair of white owls living in an old barn that was not used. They stayed at home in the day time, for owls do not like to go out in the sunlight.

The owls had very pretty pale yellow and white feathers; they had white breasts and wings and soft white feathers round their large eyes; and their legs were feathered down to the claws.

These owls did not hoot as the brown owls do, but they made a strange hissing and snoring noise when any one disturbed them. They screeched too while they flew about at night, and so some people called them screech-owls, which I do not think a very pretty name.

The mother owl laid her eggs under the eaves of the old barn. She did not trouble herself to



THE WHITE OWLS.

make a tidy nest, but laid her five eggs among the rubbish on the old wall.

The young owls that were hatched from the eggs were quaint little creatures all covered with down; they looked more like balls of feathers than birds.

They stayed a long while in their rough nest, and the old owls took it in turns to feed them. They would eat nothing but mice, and the old ones knew very well where to find them.

About an hour before sunset they would come out, flying on soft white wings that made no noise, and hunt all along the hedges and about the haystacks and the barn doors; and scarcely five minutes passed without a little mouse being caught and carried to the nest in the barn.

Often when the haymakers were at work in the fields, they saw the white owl fly from the old barn across the meadows by the river side. They knew where the nest was, and had often peeped at the little staring owlets, under the eaves, but they never hurt them or disturbed them at all.

But it happened that there was a boy in the village who was very proud to be old enough to

fire a gun; and one evening he went out in the fields with his gun in his hand, to see what he could shoot.

It was just getting dusk, when he saw the mother of the little owls glide by,—he lifted up his gun and fired, and the poor owl fell! The boy ran to pick her up, but she had fallen into the river, and he could not reach her, so he went home with his gun.

The little owls in the nest waited long for their mother; and when they grew hungry they cried and complained so much that the other old owl flew out to get them some food.

He soon found a mouse and brought it home, but what was that to so many hungry mouths! Away he flew again and again, and sometimes he stayed to seek for his lost mate; but her body had long since floated down the stream, and he could never see her again!

The poor solitary owl tried his best to feed the five hungry young ones, and scarcely took time to eat anything himself. But he could not do it,—one by one they pined away and died in the nest, for they were not old enough to fly.

When the good-natured haymakers went one day to take a peep at their funny little friends, they found nothing but the little starved bodies all lying in a heap.

The poor owl that was left without a mate and without nestlings, flew away and never lived in the old barn any more: and all this was the fault of the thoughtless boy, who was so proud of his gun.



THE LATE STRAWBERRY BLOSSOM.

HENRY came running to his mama, looking very angry and hot. "Oh, mama," cried he, "a naughty, ragged boy in the street threw a stone at me, and said rude words when I passed by. He would not mind when I told him to leave off. I wish papa was here that he might go and beat him."

"Do you think that would make him good and kind, Henry?" asked his mama very gently.

"I do not know," said Henry, "but I think he behaved very badly, and ought to be punished. You punish me, mama, when I do wrong."

"Yes, Henry," answered his mama, "but I also teach you what is right. Perhaps the ragged little boy in the street has never been taught what is good and right, and so he grows up doing many

naughty things and saying many rude words, which you never do or say."

"Yes, mama," said Henry, and he did not look quite so much as if he wanted the rude boy to be beaten.

"Sit down by me," said his mama, "and I will tell you a story. When I was a little girl, I was very fond of the wild flowers in the hedges; but best of all I liked a bank of wild strawberries. I called it my strawberry bed, and watched the plants as they grew.

"The little round buds unfolded so prettily into broad white blossoms in the June sunshine, and when they had fallen, the tiny green fruit grew larger day by day, until it hung ripe and red, and beautiful, from the russet stem.

"Now it happened that I once passed my strawberry bed quite late in the year, when no one had thought of strawberries for a long time; for the leaves had changed on the trees and most of the hedge flowers were dead.

"I looked at my strawberry bed, and tried to count the new plants that had taken root in the summer, and at last I spied a blossom. One,

solitary, white strawberry blossom in October! I was so pleased, I jumped with joy; and as the days were often sunny I quite thought that it would get ripe, and then I meant to give it to my mama on her birth-day.

"I watched the blossom every day, but when it was full blown the nights became very frosty, and one morning I found there were black spots upon the white leaves, and they looked nipped and faded. And the next day it was dead!

"You can hardly tell how sorry I felt, and how I wondered why this little blossom, as pretty as any of the rest, was not born until October, while the others came out in the sweet sunny days of June.

"Now, when I see a little, ragged, untaught child, it always makes me think of the little lonely blossom, that was born to wintry days, and could bear no summer fruit."

"And then you feel sorry, mama, and not angry!" said Henry, and he kissed his gentle mother's cheek.

A FABLE ABOUT THREE LITTLE GOLD FISHES.

THERE was once a very kind man and he had three gold fishes, the prettiest little fishes in the world. He kept them in a clear pond, and was very fond of them. He often went to the pond and sat down by the edge and threw crumbs of bread into the water, and the little fishes came and eat them.

The man very often said to them, "Little fishes remember two things, and then you will always be safe and happy. Do not go through the iron grating into the large pond, which is next to this little one; and do not swim at the top of the water when I am not here. Remember these two things."

But the little fishes did not understand what he

meant; so the kind man said, "I will make them understand in another way." So he went and stood by the iron grating, and when one of the gold fishes came near it and wanted to swim through into the large pond, the man made a splashing in the water with his stick to frighten it away. And he did the same when any of them swam at the top of the water, to make them go down again. "Now," said the man, "I think they will understand," and he went home.

When the man was gone, the three little gold fishes laid their heads together and began to talk to each other, and to wonder why the kind man would not let them go through the grating, or swim at the top of the water.

One of them said, "The man walks about at the top himself, I wonder why we may not go up too!"

Another of the gold fish said, "I wonder why we are to be shut up in this little pond; I do not see what harm it would do if we went into the large one sometimes."

Then the first one said, "I think he is a cruel man, who does not love us, and does not like that we should be happy."

Foolish little fish to speak so!

Then the second goldfish said, "I shall not mind him a bit, I shall just go and have a swim in the large pond."

And the first one said, "And I will go and play a little at the top of the water where the sun shines."

The third little goldfish was the only wise one, and it thought, "The man is kind to us, I am sure he knows a good reason for what he tells us. If he did not love us he would not come to feed us so often. I know he is a kind man, and I will do what he bids me, though I do not know *why* it is."

So this good, obedient little fish stayed quietly at the bottom of the small pond.

But the other two did as they said they would. The one swam through the grating into the large pond, and the other played at the top of the water; and they both laughed at their brother for being obedient.

But what happened? As soon as the one gold fish had swum a little in the large pond a great pike met it and swallowed it.

And a large gray bird saw the other naughty

gold fish playing in the sunshine, and pounced down and caught it, and swallowed it too.

So only the obedient little fish was left safe in the small pond. The kind man was very glad that it was so good, and he came to feed it every day. And the good little gold fish lived a long time in the small pond and was very happy.



THE FABLE OF THE DISCONTENTED TREE.

THERE was once a little tree in the wood, that was covered with needles instead of leaves. This little tree said, "All my companions have pretty leaves, but I have only needles that nobody cares to touch. If I might have a wish, I would be covered with leaves of gold."

So the little tree fell fast asleep wishing; and when it awoke early next morning, only think, it was covered with leaves of gold, that shone most beautifully in the sun, and it said, "Now I am finer than any tree in the wood."

But in the evening an old jew, with a long beard, came through the wood; and when he saw the golden leaves, he plucked them every one, and carried them away in his sack.

Then the poor little stripped tree was very sad, and said, "Oh, my beautiful golden leaves! now I am ashamed to be seen. The other trees have all their pretty leaves, whilst I am bare. If I might wish again, I would have leaves of crystal glass."

So the little tree fell asleep again. It awoke very early and found that it had leaves of glittering glass; and it said, "Now I have something to be proud of, no tree in the wood has leaves that glitter so."

But soon there came a strong wind and shook all the trees in the wood, and at last it came to the bright leaves of glass; and in a few minutes they all lay broken on the ground!

Then the little tree said sorrowfully, "All my pretty glass leaves lie broken on the ground, though the other trees are not hurt by the storm. I wish I had leaves like theirs."

So the little tree fell asleep again and awoke early and smiled, for it had its wish and said, "Now I may shew myself among the rest without shame."

But just then the nanmy-goat came into the

wood to look for food for herself and her kids; she soon saw the fresh green leaves and began to eat them as fast as she could.

So the little tree was stripped bare once more, and it said to itself, "Now I will not wish for any kind of leaves, neither green ones, nor glass ones, nor gold ones. If I had only my needles again, I should be content."

And the little tree fell asleep very sadly, and very sadly it awoke; but when it looked at itself in the morning sun, it laughed and laughed again, and all the trees in the wood laughed with it—and why? Because in the night it had got all its needles back again, as anyone may see that looks at it; but they had better not touch it because it pricks!



THE FABLE OF THE LITTLE TREE THAT LEFT ITS HOME.

In a tall and shadowy wood
A little tree in summer stood;
Around it grew so many trees,
It had not room to stand at ease.
The little tree was forced to stoop,
And let its leaves and branches droop.
Then to itself it said one day,
"I'll not stay here, I will away,
And for a dwelling I will search,
Where neither oak, nor ash, nor birch,
Nor any other tree does grow,
And then I shan't be crowded so;
There I will dance, and there I'll play
So merrily the livelong day.

Away then went the little tree,
And soon it found a field to be
Its home, where not a tree had grown;
So there it fixed its root alone.
The new home pleased the little tree,
“ And here,” it said, “ I’ll always be.”

A merry stream ran through the grass,
And close beside the tree did pass;
If it was hot it freely took
Some water from the cold clear brook.
The sun shone bright, as bright could be,
And if ’twas cold it warmed the tree.
A lively breeze came every day
To help the tree to dance and play.
The tree danced with the wind alone,
Until the summer days were gone;
Until the crown upon its head
Had fallen off all dry and dead.
The leaves which made its crown before,
The little tree had now no more;
For they were scattered all around—
Some in the streamlet might be found,

And some were lying in the sun,
Some with the wind a race did run.

When autumn came with cold and frost,
The tree soon felt what it had lost;
And called down to the merry brook,
“Oh, give me back the leaves you took,
For I shall be in great distress
Without a proper winter dress.”

Then said the brook, much to its grief,
“I can't give back a single leaf,
For every one of them I drank,
And in my waters deep they sank.”
Then from the brook the poor tree turned,
And looked up where the sunshine burned.
“Give me my leaves again,” it cried.
The sun looked down and straight replied,
“Your leaves are burnt, my hands of flame
Scorched them to death when first they came.”
Then to the wind it quickly said,
“Return to me the leaves I've shed.”
“I cannot, even if I will,
My wings have blown them o'er the hill.”

Then said the tree with tearful voice,
"I have no longer any choice.
I will go back into the wood,
Where once among the trees I stood.
No doubt they will remember me,
And very warm and snug 'twill be.

But when it came unto the wood,
The trees so close together stood,
It could not find the smallest space
To serve it for a sheltering place;
For each tree said—"No room have I."
The tree was quite inclined to cry;
And as they would not let it stay,
It sorrowfully went away.

It wandered on and almost froze,
Because it had no winter clothes.
Just then a woodman passing by,
Rubbed his cold hands most ruefully.
"This woodman," said the shivering tree,
"May easily give help to me.
A bargain I will make with him,
That he shall hew me limb from limb;

To warm himself is his desire,
So he may lay me on the fire:
Thus I'll warm him whilst he warms me,
And so we both well pleased shall be."

The woodman liked this clever plan,
To whet his axe he straight began;
And as there was no time to spare,
He felled the tree; and then with care
He chopped it into chip and log,
And homeward with his load did jog.
And every now and then he laid
Some on the fire his wife had made.

The largest log among them all
He left for us out in the hall.
Go, fetch it in, and we will praise
Its cheerful warmth and ruddy blaze.
We'll boil the kettle till it sings,
While Betty sets the best tea-things.

THE END.



